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Reply to Office Action of 23 November 2005

AMENDMENTS TO THE SPECIFICATION

Please amend the Specification as follows:

[0002] The general concept of providing a barrier to isolate a user from contamination is well known in the prior art. However, none of the methods known in the prior art provide for a method of providing a contamination barrier externally attachable to a carrying bag that is not subject to the cross-contamination of clean surfaces during use or is easily deployed with minimal user intervention. George, et.al. (Patent Number 3,253,293) teaches a method of providing a clean surface upon which to stand in a bathroom environment but is not configurable to a sports bag. Hirshberg (Patent Application 20020074251) teaches the use of a sports bag incorporating an internally stored flexible mat that can be manually rolled-up and stored within a compartment internal to a sports bag, but this method requires the user to manually remove and deploy the mat from an internal bag compartment, which exposes the user to contaminated surfaces and the bag to cross-contamination. Furthermore, the process of rolling a flexible mat upon itself allows intimate contact between its clean upper surface and its lower surface that is contaminated through contact with a floor. After its first use, redeployment of the ~~said~~ mat exposes the user to undesirable contaminated surfaces. The disadvantages of this method are:

- a) Cross-contamination of clean and soiled surfaces,
- b) Exposure of the user to contaminated surfaces while manually deploying the mat, and
- c) Consumption of usable internal space within the sports bag.

Consequently, there is a need for a method of providing a contamination barrier externally attachable to a carrying bag that is not subject to the cross-contamination of its clean surfaces during use and which is easily deployed with minimal user intervention.

[0003] Since locker room floors are difficult to sanitize and keep dry, this invention describes methods of preventing foot and clothing contact with wet and/or contaminated floor surfaces. Envisioned as an accessory integrated into a common carrying bag, one embodiment of this invention isolates the user from the floor by means of a conveniently deployable barrier sheet(s) or panel(s) that can be externally affixed either removably or permanently to the external surface of a sports bag with the attachment to the bottom

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exterior surface of the carrying bag as the preferred embodiment. These rigid or semi-rigid hinged panels can be deployed in a fully extended configuration when in use to provide a sanitary surface upon which a user can stand or upon which a user can rest articles upon. The said-barrier floor shield can be folded up and stowed externally within the footprint of the carrying bag in a compact manner through a procedure described herein, minimizing exposure of the user to contamination. The preferred embodiment to retain the hinged panel barrier in a folded configuration is by the means of magnetic latches. However, the use of a wide variety of available fasteners, such as male and female mating hook and loop fasteners, clips, snaps, etc. can be conceivably employed within the spirit of this invention by one skilled in the art. In the context of this invention, a "carrying bag" is defined as a bag used to carry clothing, sports or other equipment, etc., or any variant bag designs such as a gym bag, duffle bag, rucksack, backpack, suitcase, travel bag, etc., or other containers used to carry such items.

[0006] It is a further object of the present invention to provide an accessible tab feature on the mat to allow the user to easily deploy and stow the said mat, preferably with the use of one hand and one foot.

[0008] It is a further object of the present invention to provide a means of optionally removing the mat accessory from the said carrying bag for cleaning, segregated use alone, or other purposes in the event permanent integration with the bag is not desired.

[0013] **FIGURE 2** is a perspective view of the preferred embodiment ~~of the present invention floor shield carrying bag accessory~~ which includes the rigid or semi-rigid hinged panel floor shield mat externally attached to the ~~a typical carrying bag~~ in a three-quarter partially-deployed configuration.

[0014] **FIGURE 3** is a perspective view of the preferred embodiment ~~of the present invention floor shield carrying bag accessory~~ which includes the rigid or semi-rigid hinged panel floor shield mat externally attached to the ~~a typical carrying bag~~ in a one-quarter partially-deployed configuration.

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[0015] **FIGURE 4** is a perspective view of the preferred embodiment of the present invention ~~floor shield carrying bag accessory~~ which includes the rigid or semi-rigid hinged panel floor shield mat externally attached to the ~~a~~ typical carrying bag in a fully-folded and stowed configuration.

[0016] **FIGURE 5** is an exploded perspective view of the preferred embodiment of the present invention, ~~showing floor shield carrying bag accessory~~ includes the rigid or semi-rigid hinged panel floor shield externally attached to the ~~a~~ carrying bag illustrating one method of removably attaching the floor shield to the bag, as well as arranging and employing magnetic latches to retain the floor shield in a folded configuration.

[0017] **FIGURE 6** is a perspective view of the preferred embodiment of the present invention ~~floor shield carrying bag accessory~~ which includes the rigid or semi-rigid hinged panel floor shield externally attached to the ~~a~~ carrying bag illustrating a preferred hinged panel folding scheme.

[0019] Referring to **FIGURE 1**, there is illustrated at 20 a carrying bag to which is affixed a floor shield mat accessory. The floor shield mat consists principally of a multiplicity of rigid or semi-rigid panels 16, 26, and 36, which are connected together by hinges 34 and 38 in the preferred embodiment. The carrying bag consists of an exterior surface to which the upper side of panel 36 (not shown) is affixed with the preferred embodiment being the bottom of the said carrying bag 20. For purposes of this description and as referenced in the appended claims, the term "mat" will be used to collectively describe panels 16, 26, and 36 and any components integrated into the said panels as described below. Similarly, "carrying bag" is defined as a bag used to carry clothing, sports or other equipment, etc., or any variant bag designs such as a gym bag, duffle bag, rucksack, backpack, suitcase, travel bag, etc., or other containers used to carry items.

[0021] **FIGURES 1, 2, 3, and 4** illustrate various configurations of the invention during deployment and stowage. An The envisioned deployment sequence of the mat is now described. When the user desires to shield himself/herself from a contaminated floor or surface, the carrying bag 20 and attached mat, as shown in **FIGURE 4** in the stowed

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configuration, is placed in a convenient location on the floor with tab 10 positioned within close proximity of the user's feet. The user then steps on tab 10 with one foot to effectively trap panel 16 against the floor and then lifts the bag 20 by means of handles 24 until sufficient force is then applied to release the invention's latching mechanism that holds the mat in a folded stowed configuration. The carrying bag is then placed on the floor with the mat in an unfolded and deployed configuration adjacent to the carrying bag. **FIGURES 3, 2 and 1**, respectively, and sequentially, illustrate the mat deployment process. When the mat is fully deployed as illustrated in **FIGURE 1**, the user is presented a clean, uncontaminated surface comprised of the upper surfaces of panels 16 and 26 upon which to stand and/or upon which the user can place articles. When the user has completed use of the mat, the user reverses the deployment sequence just described by lifting the bag 20 by its handles 24 and refolding the mat to its original folded and stowed configuration allowing the latching mechanism to retain the mat as shown in **FIGURE 4**. It will be appreciated that other methods of deploying the mat, such as using the hands instead of a foot against tab 10, or alternatively, by simply shaking the carrying bag to deploy the mat without the use of tab 10 are possible.

[0024] An alternative embodiment of this invention allows the use of non-permanent, removable methods to those familiar in the art, such as magnetic fasteners or latches, mechanical screw-type fasteners, hook and loop fasteners, snaps, etc., to affix the mat to the carrying bag 20, as shown in Fig. 5, where mechanical screw-type fasteners 50 are illustrated as one example of a means to allow easy mat removal for cleaning, solitary use independent of the carrying bag, or other purposes. In the preferred but optional embodiment, the fasteners or latches are permanently integrated into the mat by any of the mechanical means described above to provide an easily removable, single-component, mat assembly.